

JOHN E. DOWELL, Jr.
Prints and Drawings

The Corcoran Gallery of Art
Washington, D. C.
March 26 - May 2, 1971

Fort Worth Art Center Museum
Fort Worth, Texas
September 12 - October 10, 1971

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The Corcoran Gallery of Art

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The exhibition of prints and drawings by John E. Dowell, Jr. and the accompanying catalogue continue a Corcoran Gallery policy of presenting work by artists of emerging national significance.

We are especially indebted to the artist and his wife, Betty, for their patience and help in organizing for exhibition this impressive and delightful body of work.

Special thanks are due to Mr. Jacob Kainen for his insightful introduction to this catalogue. Also, for first introducing the Corcoran staff to Mr. Dowell's work, we are grateful to Mr. Sam Gilliam.

Finally, I would like to thank Connie Fowlkes for her assistance in collating material for the catalogue, and Steve Ringle, a staff preparator, for his help in assembling the exhibition.

Renato Danese
Curator of Contemporary Art



Photo by Betty P. Dowell, 1971

INTRODUCTION

by Jacob Kainen

When John Dowell submitted his suite of eight lithographs, *Triangular Fugue*, to Glen Alps at the University of Washington in partial fulfillment of his requirements for the M.F.A. degree, it was clear that he was already a printmaker of commanding stature. That was in 1965. Earlier, Dowell had studied advanced lithography with Garo Antreasian at the John Herron Art Institute and had been an artist-printer fellow at the Tamarind Lithography Workshop in Los Angeles. He had also studied with Arthur Flory and Romas Viesulas. Thoroughly trained in the techniques of collography, etching, and lithography, Dowell was superbly equipped to express himself in the graphic media.

The prints in *Triangular Fugue* are made up of intuitive scratchings, scribblings and calligraphic notations that obliquely suggest flying objects, insects, trees, and figures. Nothing is spelled out—all is implication. Each print is dominated by a rough enclosing triangle with an open end, and this triangle is usually deeper in color than the others, which have a soft, putty-like tenderness. The colors, as in all of Dowell's work, aren't pretty in spite of their elegance. They carry out the feeling of an intense emotional reserve. For an artist of twenty-four, *Triangular Fugue* was a remarkable achievement and a foreshadowing of things to come. Dowell was already artistically

mature and his later work continued, on an expanded scale, along the lines he had set for himself.

Dowell's training as a lithographer has been crucial in his development. He has learned the hard way from masters and can appreciate the value of expert printing. Practically all artists have to rely upon master craftsmen to translate their color sketches into lithographs. They can't do the printing themselves and expect good results—too much technical know-how is involved. But an intangible something is often lost in the process. The printers' ideas tend to dominate, a circumstance helpful for the weaker artists but too pat for the better ones. What Dowell's Tamarind experience did for him was to combine in his outlook the willfulness of the artist and the flawless craft of the printer. In whatever medium he practices, Dowell bears in mind this double attitude.

In 1966 Dowell began a long period of work on etchings and aquatints in black-and-white. These prints continued to show his preoccupation with the troubling fancies that lie just below the conscious level. They are difficult to describe. *Six Bagatelles* gives the feeling of natural forces out of control—an underground trap, creatures flying and falling into the trap, and strange

organisms moving about elsewhere. But Dowell's actual images aren't so literal. They are composed of scribbled fragments that, somehow, evoke disturbing possibilities.

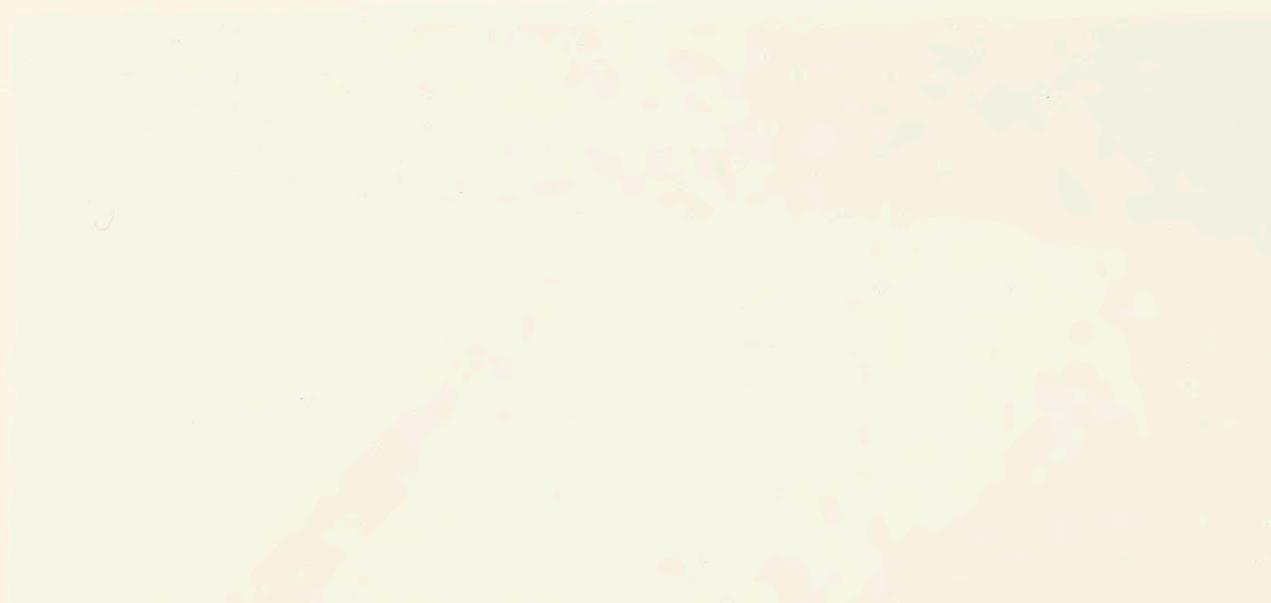
Sometimes the images more clearly approximate recognizable objects. *On that Great Day if it Should Come*, done in 1967, features an ominous dark shape, remotely related to a chariot or weird car with something like a rear bumper. We are taken on a dangerous trip in an atmosphere full of menace, and that is the feeling created by most of the black-and-whites of the late sixties. Among many superb pieces of the period, all beautifully printed by Dowell, *Gimbels* of 1967 is closest in character to *On that Great Day*. . . . Linear jottings, seemingly uncalculated, resolve themselves into hieroglyphs of figures involved with machines. Somewhere in the offing is a contraption that suggests nothing so much as a carpet sweeper.

Again, I don't want to give the impression that Dowell's intaglio prints deal with recognizable subjects, however obliquely presented. They deal with states of mind, carrying on from Surrealist sources. There are faint echoes of Miro, Masson, and especially Matta, but the echoes are remote. No artist springs full-grown from the brow of Jove, and Dowell has his artistic forebears. But if his inspiration comes from the automatism of certain

of the Surrealists, it is more a matter of spiritual kinship than direct influence.

Dowell is greatly concerned with poetry and music, which provide some of his graphic sources. When I saw the large intaglio of 1968, *And I had Become a Man with the Slippery Future of a Fish*, I thought the title might have been derived from a Surrealist work of the thirties. But Dowell wasn't thinking of Surrealism at all—he had in mind a line from Archie Shepp's poem, *The Wedding*, which is an up-to-date conception. Generations overlap; the irrational in art has a way of seeming timeless.

In 1969 Dowell returned to lithography and has worked mainly in this medium up to the present. After some tentative explorations that didn't quite come off, and some beautiful achievements such as *Letter to My Betty I* and *II*, he began a series of eight color lithographs titled *Visual Poems*. An idea he had played with before, that of fragments holding the top of a vertical composition and drifting down, now received a more structured treatment. Some time earlier, lacking the time to write a letter, he had made a drawing on ordinary lined tablet paper. The pale blue horizontal lines, he found, contributed a rigid framework that kept the superimposed drawn lines from being lost in an empty space. The printed lines weren't obtrusive; they stayed back but gave the drawing a delicate scaffolding.



The lithographs in the *Visual Poems* series, some of which were printed at the American pavilion in Venice during the Biennale last summer, make use of the copy book horizontals as transformed by Dowell, but more widely spaced than their prototypes and in a variety of pale colors. The calligraphic notations tumbling down the page have lost their Surrealist connotations and have a more formal, ceremonious quality. Taking his cues from the written page, the printed page, wall inscriptions, and music scores, Dowell has moved toward the purely graphic elements that have existed at all times in civilized communities.

But it would be a mistake to carry the parallel with fine writing too far. Dowell makes compositions in which sudden emphatic touches pull the eye in various directions to create a precarious but finally satisfying balance. Sharp brisk curves and hooks give lively emphasis at critical points, along with blurred little areas of color. Tangles of softer lines at the top, in a variety of colors, hold the eye momentarily before it moves downward. Thus, while calligraphy forms the basis for these prints, it is often overlaid with unexpected notes of tone and color.

One of the finest of the series is *Drownin' on Dry Land* (how I envy him his titles). The top horizontal here is thicker and more dominant

than in the others. The colors are strange and beautiful—soft pink, violet, green—and very much Dowell's own. *Coltrane Sonnet* has the dignity and elegance of Arabic writing, and *Um, Um . . . Um!!* is pure unfettered calligraphy.

The ink drawings, especially, make use of the swift, cursive script that Dowell, in essence, derives from unconscious sources. Here the artist is at his most spontaneous and most elegant. There is something melancholy about true elegance, as if it had too exquisite a fabric to endure in a coarse-grained world. Thus Dowell's delicacy gives his drawings a vulnerable air, not too different in basic nature from his earlier, more anxiety-ridden prints.

It is a tribute to the spectacular rise in the appreciation of printmaking during the past few years that an artist as subtle as Dowell has come to the fore so rapidly despite the overwhelming tide of more decorative, and more easily understood, graphic artists. Dowell has great depth—his rhythms and movements are the result of complex planning. The compositions might seem intuitive and off-hand, but they are based upon structural principles he has thought out for himself. There is no fat in his work: every touch and dot is essential to the expression. I think it is clear that John Dowell is a graphic artist with a unique personal viewpoint, one that expresses some of the true hidden values of our times.



5. *Triangular Fugue IV* 1965

John Giorno



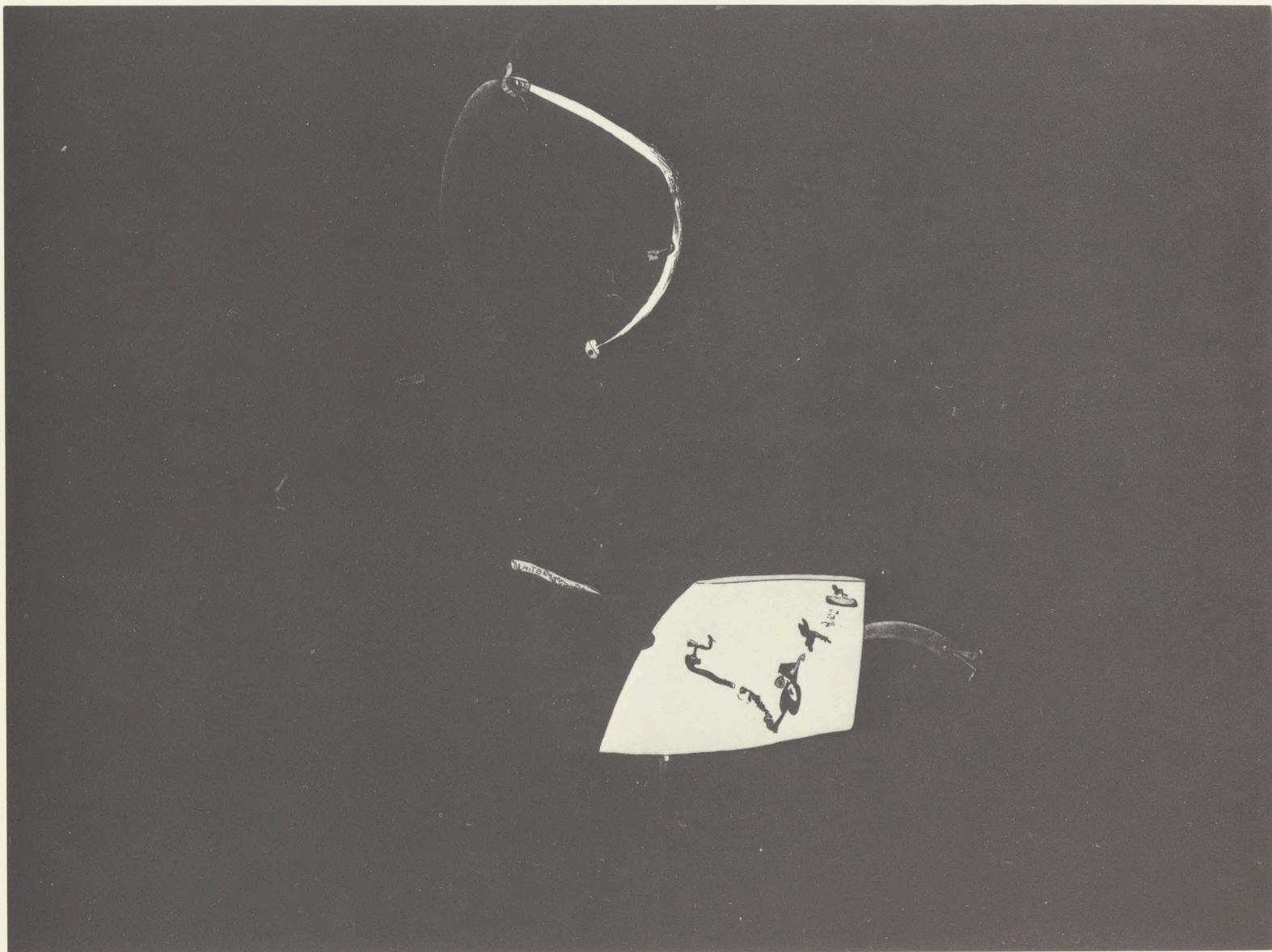
7. *Triangular Fugue VI* 1965



11. *Six Bagatelles* 1966



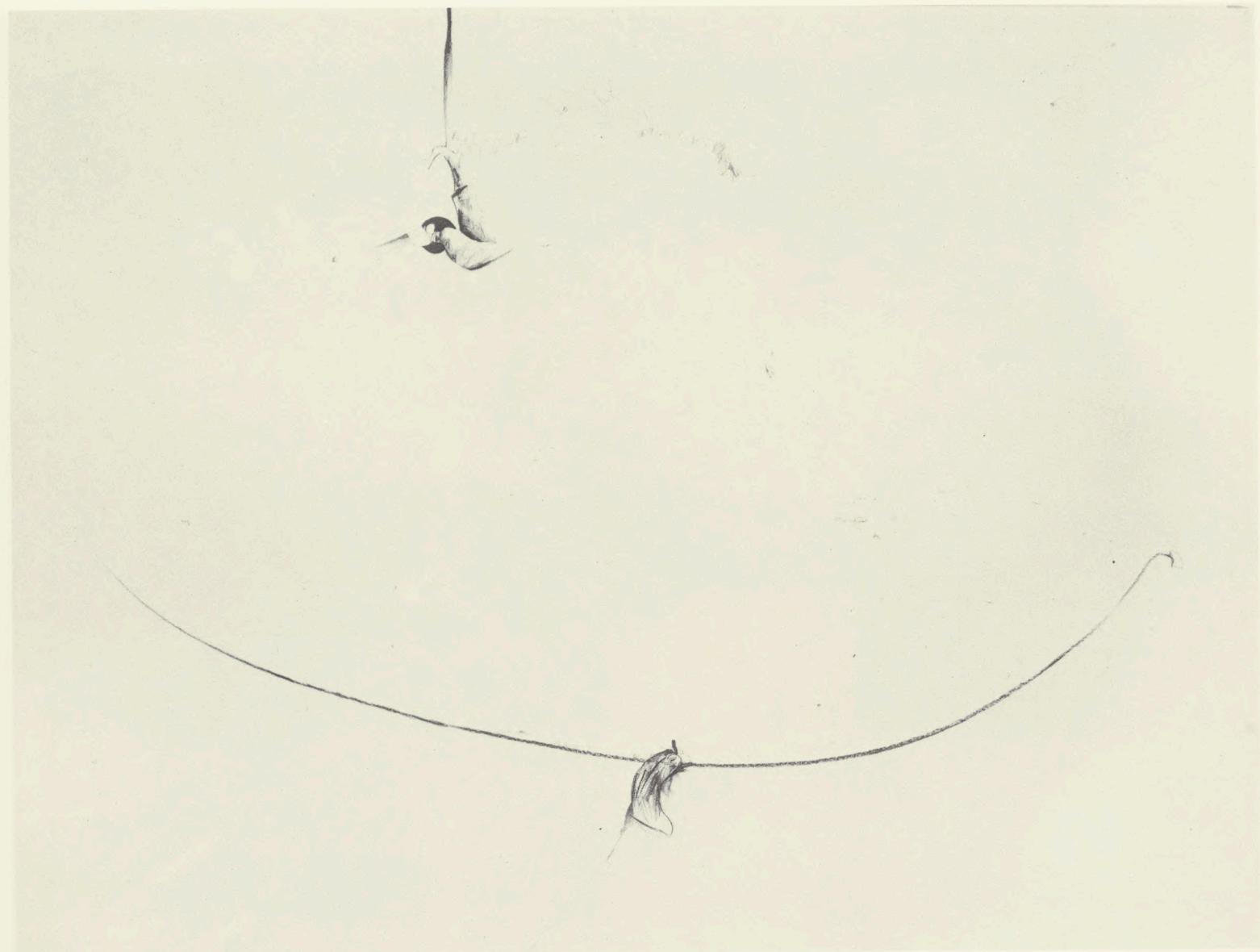
15. Sounds 1967



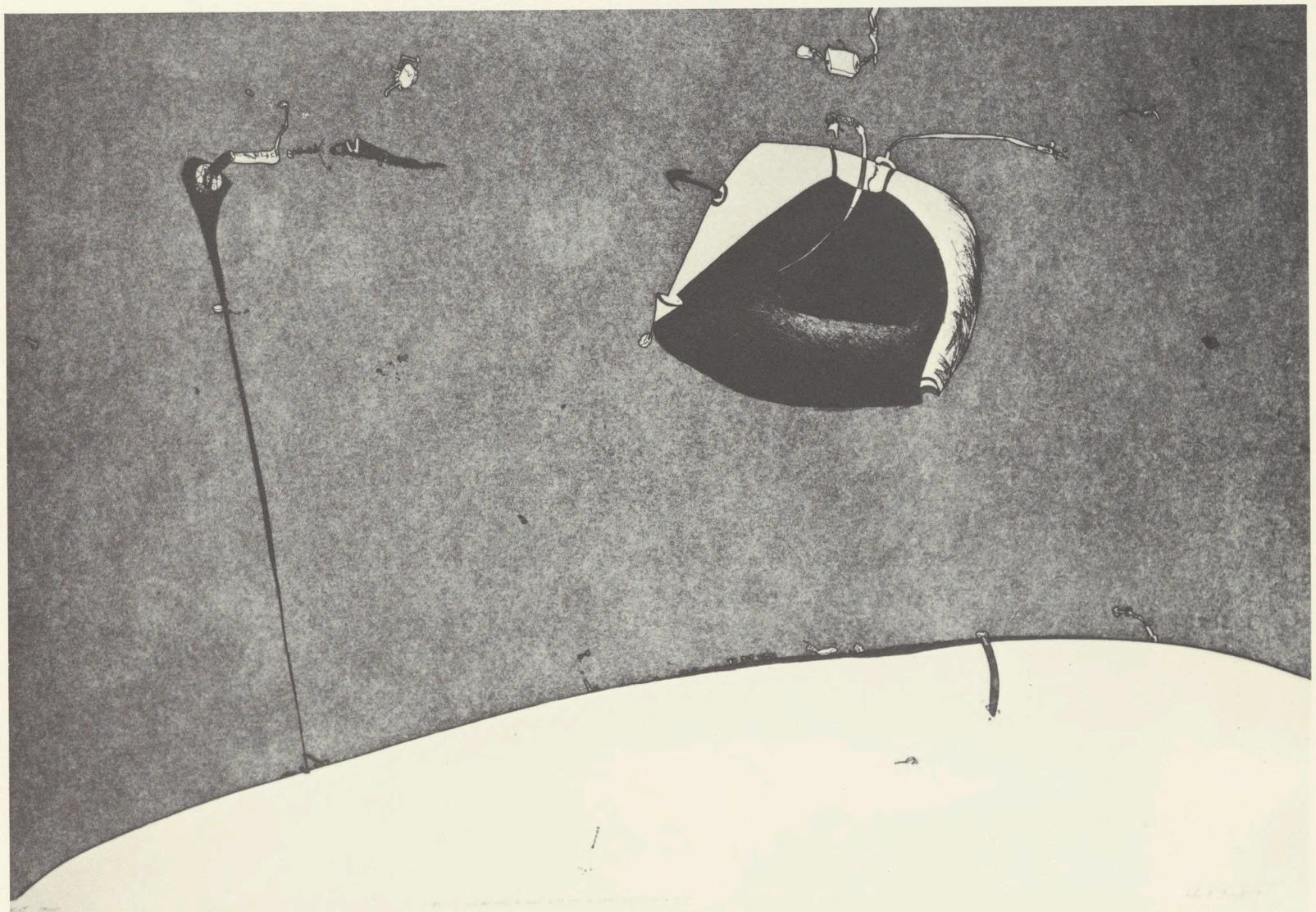
18. *The White Wheel* of W.T.H. 1967



19. *Soul Coltrane* 1967



22. Fall 1967 1967



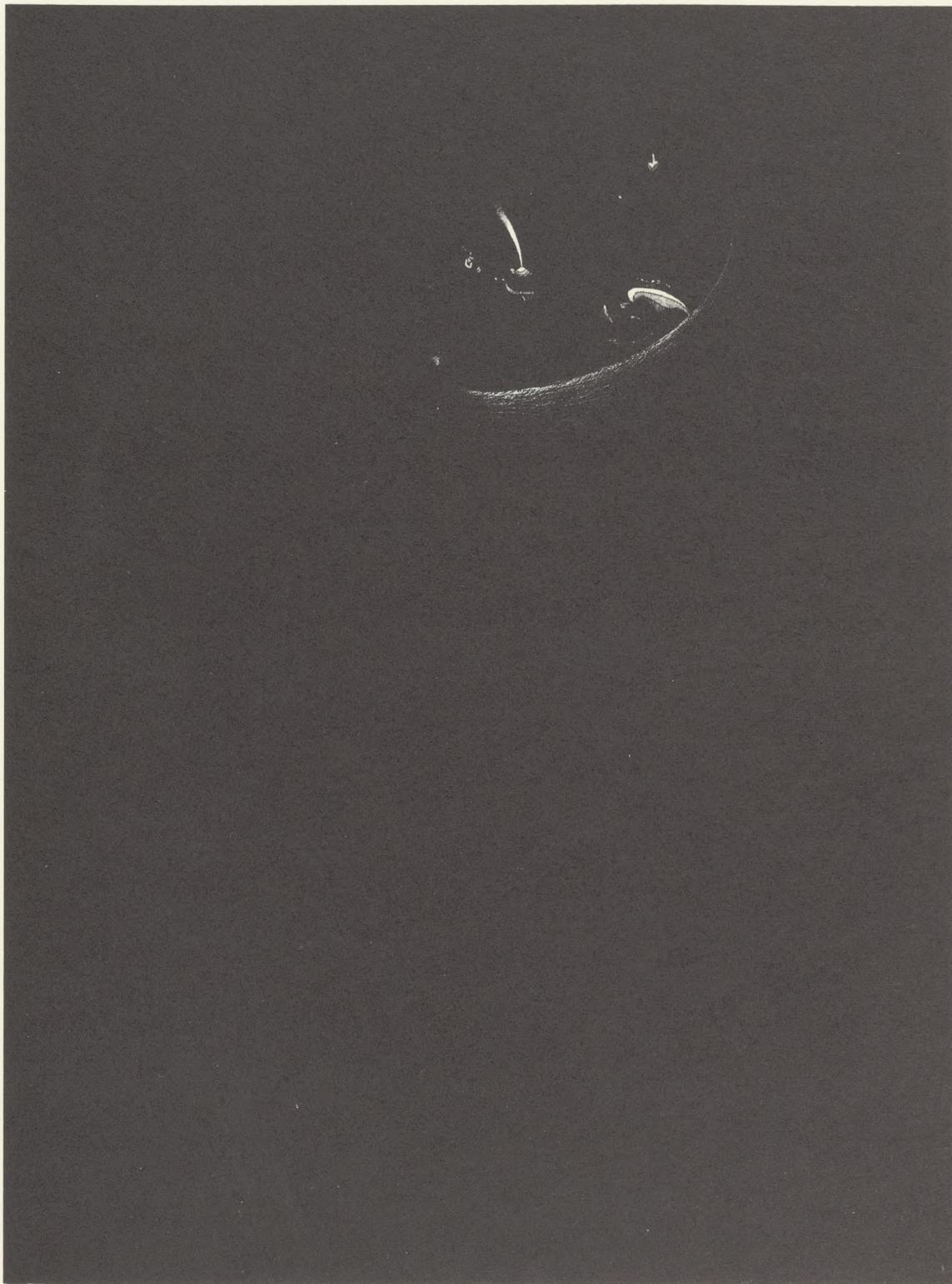
29. *And I had Become a Man With the Slippery Future of a Fish . . .* 1968



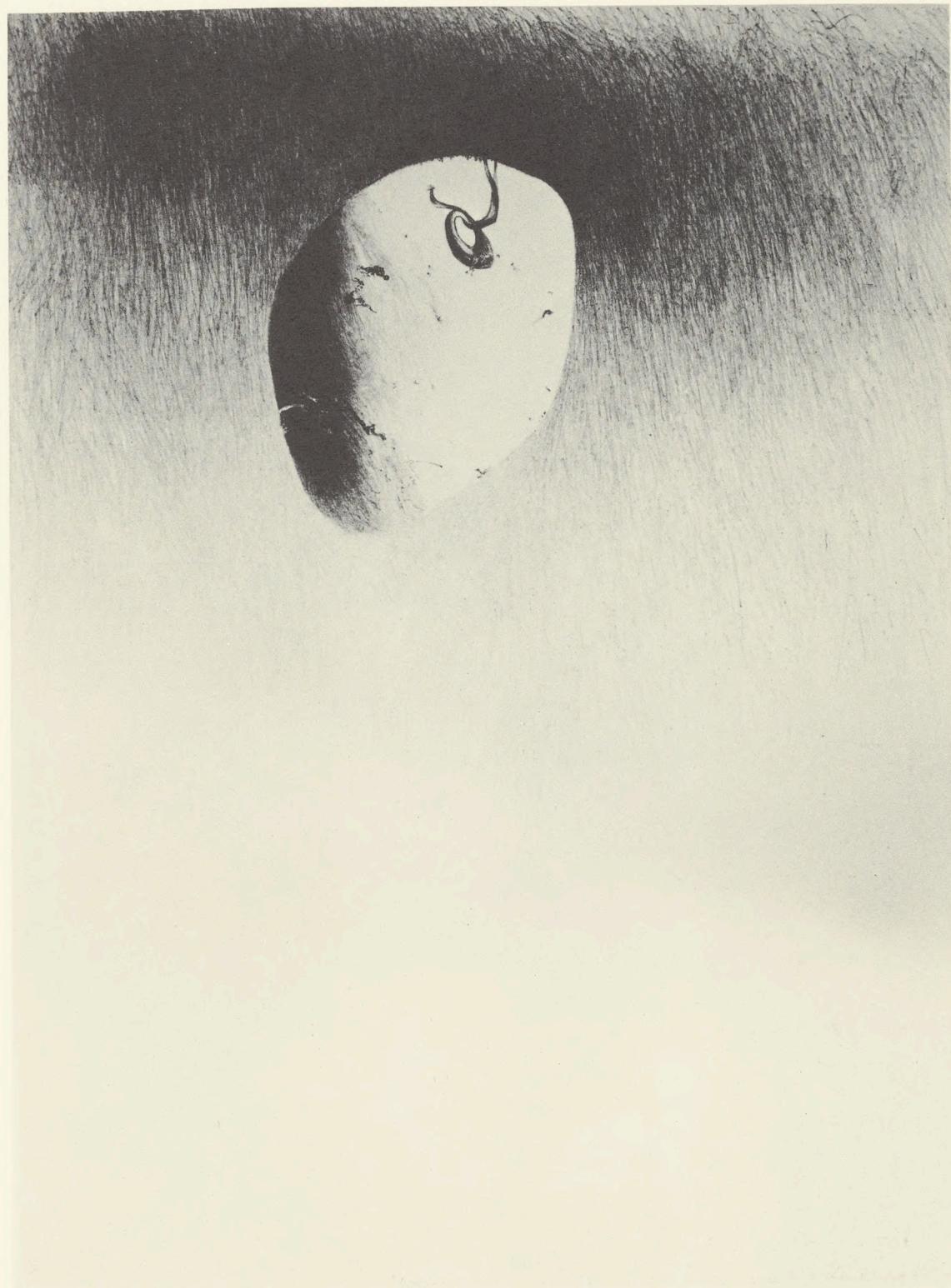
28. *To Where* 1968



24. *Portrait of Bud* 1968



30. *Whew !!* 1968



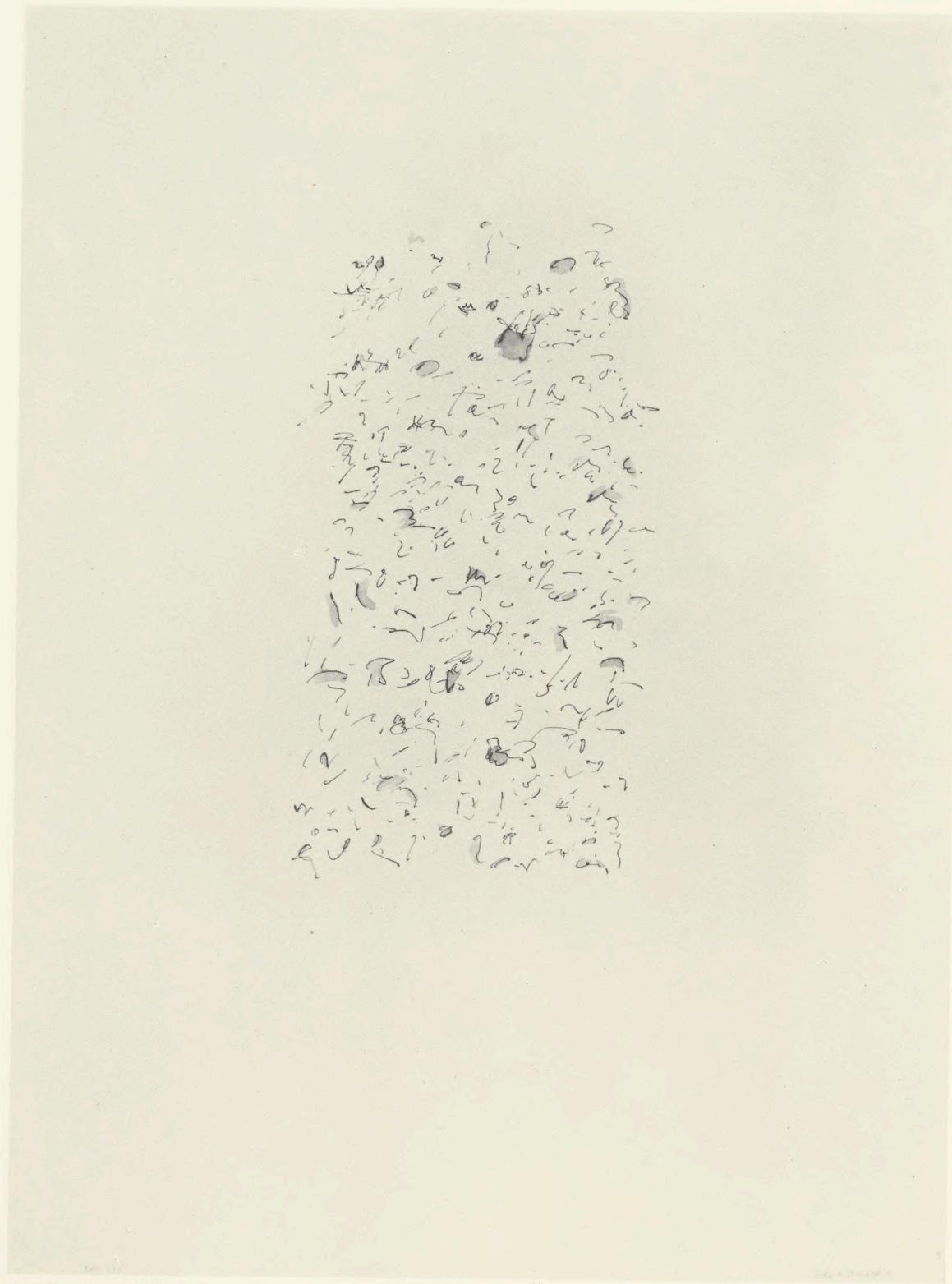
33. *Doughnut* 1969



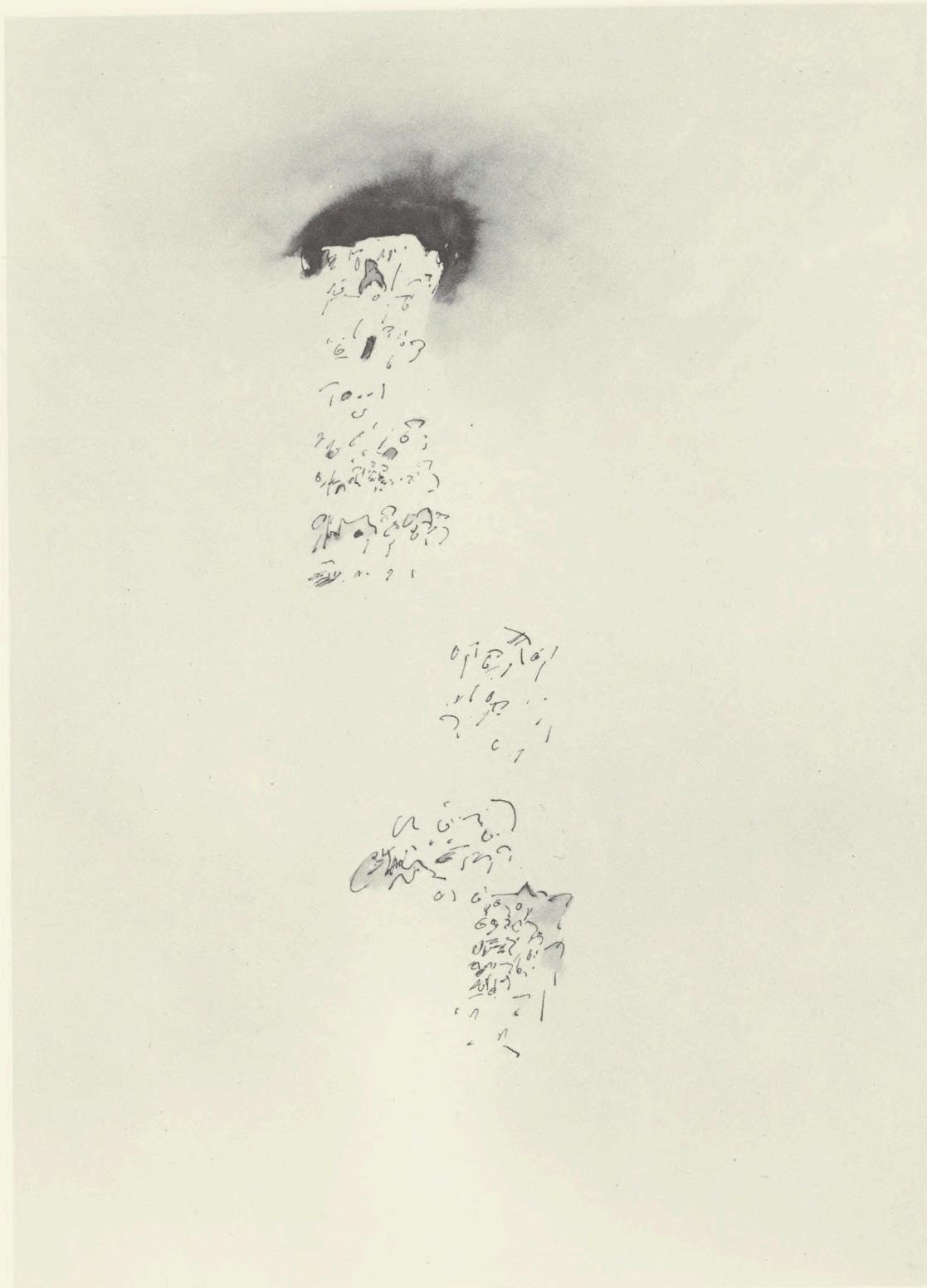
36. *It's Time* 1969



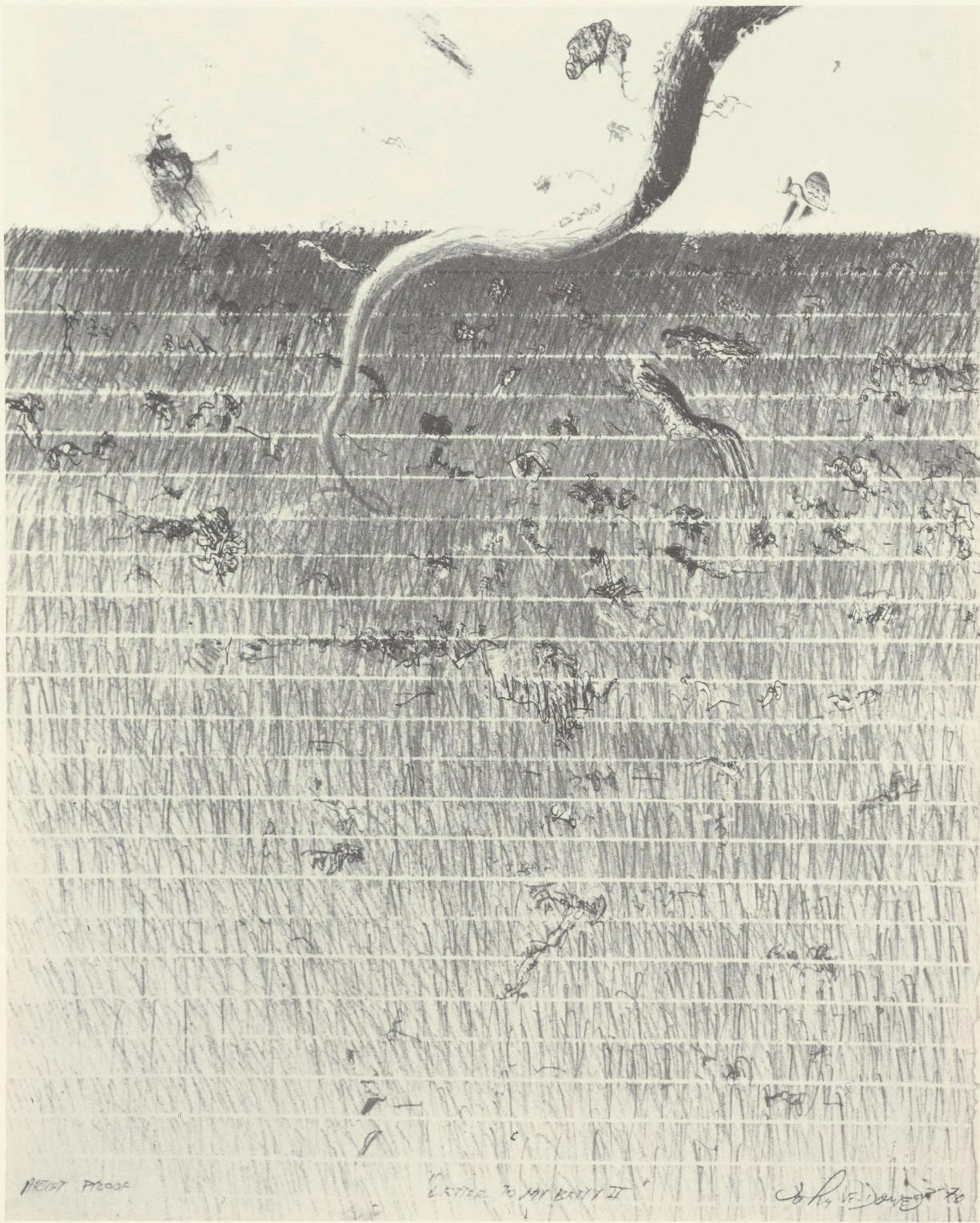
39. Directions—Open, then Close 1970



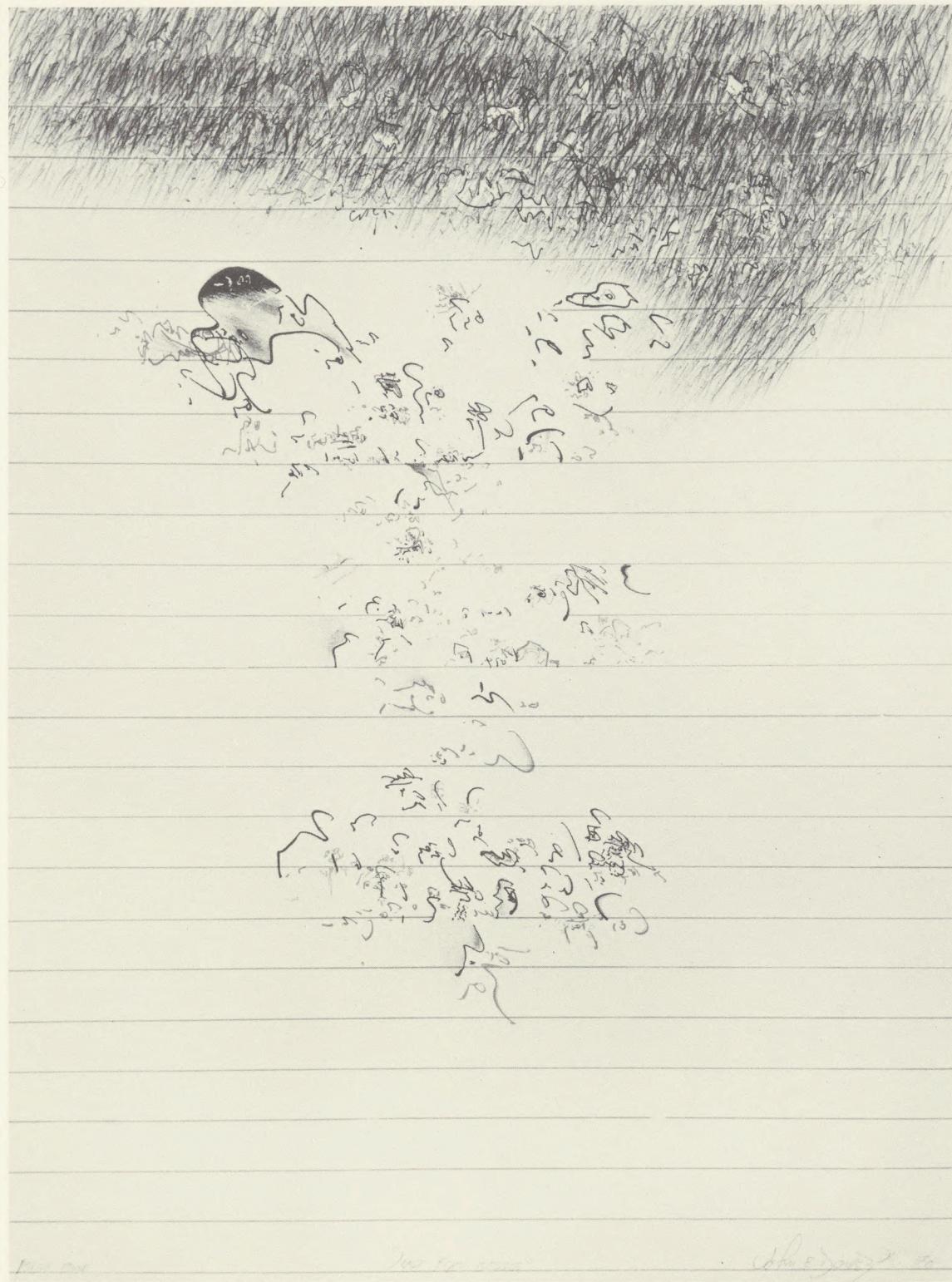
41. Far Cry 1970



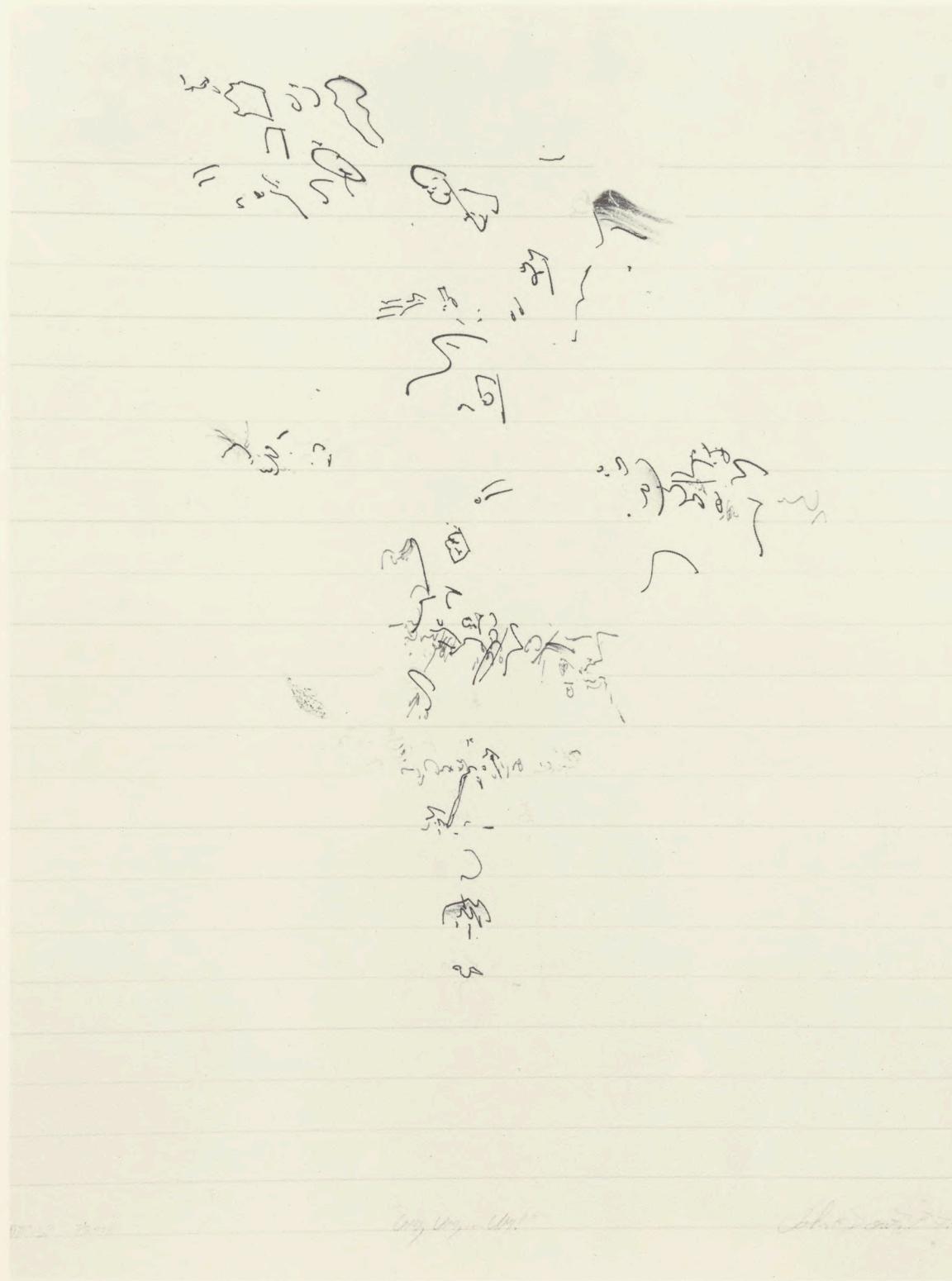
44. A Silent Way 1970



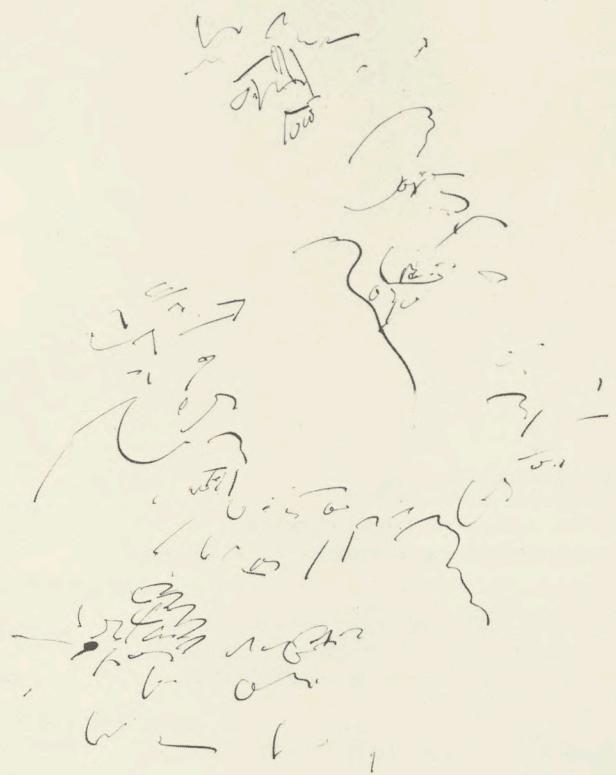
49. Letter to My Betty II 1970



54. Just Heard Bessie 1970-71



57. Um, Um . . . Um !! 1970-71



58. Dream 1971

CHRONOLOGY

Born on March 25, 1941 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

- 1959-63 Attended the Tyler School of Fine Arts, Temple University, Philadelphia, majored in printmaking and ceramics. B.F.A. Degree with honors.
- 1963 Grant to study advanced lithography with Garo Antreasian at the John Herron Art Institute, Indianapolis, in a program conducted by the Tamarind Lithography Workshop under the auspices of the Ford Foundation.
- 1963-64 Artist-printer Fellow in advanced lithography at the Tamarind Lithography Workshop, Los Angeles.
- 1964-66 Graduate student in printmaking and drawing at the University of Washington, Seattle. M.F.A. Degree.
- 1965 Graduate Research Grant for research in color lithography, University of Washington, Seattle.
- 1966 Grant to study advanced lithography at the Tamarind Lithography Workshop, Los Angeles.
- 1966-68 Instructor of Printmaking and Drawing, Indiana State University, Terre Haute.
- 1968 Visiting Instructor in Printmaking, Tyler School of Fine Arts, Temple University, Philadelphia.
- 1968 Assistant Professor of Art, Lithography and Drawing, University of Illinois, Champaign.
- 1969 Faculty Summer Fellowship, University of Illinois, Champaign.
- 1969-70 Graduate Research Board Faculty Equipment Grant, University of Illinois, Champaign.
- 1970 Faculty Summer Fellowship, University of Illinois, Champaign.

EXHIBITIONS

One Man Exhibitions

1968 Swope Art Gallery, Terre Haute, Indiana.
University of Illinois Department of Art,
Champaign, Illinois.
Philadelphia Print Club, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

1969 Western College for Women, Oxford, Ohio.
Bradley University, Peoria, Illinois.
Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee.

1970 American Pavilion, *35th Venice Biennale*, Venice, Italy.
Western Illinois University, Macomb, Illinois.

1971 University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky.

Group Exhibitions

1965 Four man print exhibition, Atrium Art Gallery, Seattle.
Thirty-second National Graphic Arts—Drawing
Exhibition, Wichita Art Association, Wichita, Kansas.
Northwest Regional Craft Exhibition, Henry Art
Gallery, Seattle, Washington.
Ninth Annual Drawing and Print Exhibition, University
of North Dakota, Grand Forks, North Dakota.
Purchase award.
Northwest International Print Exhibition, Seattle Art
Museum, Seattle, Washington.
Fifth Annual Mercyherst National Exhibition, Erie Art
Center, Erie, Pennsylvania.
Northwest Regional Printmakers Exhibition, Henry Art
Gallery, Seattle, Washington.
Huntington-Hartford Annual Print Exhibition,
Huntington-Hartford Art Center, Huntington,
New Jersey.

University of Washington Student Painting and Print
Exhibition, Hub Gallery, Seattle, Washington.
Juror's Choice.

Bellevue Arts and Crafts Annual, Bellevue, Washington.
Anacortes Fourth Annual Arts and Crafts Festival,
Anacortes, Washington. Second Prize.
Purchase award.

1966 *Forty-seventh Annual American Graphics Society*
Print Exhibition, New York, New York.
Northwest International Print Exhibition, Seattle Art
Museum, Seattle, Washington.

1967 *11th Annual Drawing and Print Exhibition*, University
of North Dakota, Grand Forks, North Dakota.
Purchase award.

Twenty-third Wabash Valley Exhibition, Swope Art
Gallery, Terre Haute, Indiana. Purchase award.
Annual Philadelphia Print Club Exhibition,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Stuart Engal
Purchase Prize.

Mid-States Art Exhibition, Evansville Museum of Arts
and Sciences, Evansville, Indiana.

Indiana Artists, John Herron Museum of Art,
Indianapolis, Indiana.

Indiana State University Faculty Art Exhibition,
Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana.
Alumni Art Exhibition, Tyler School of Fine Art,
Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

1968 *American Graphic Workshops*, Cincinnati Art
Museum, Cincinnati, Ohio. Museum Purchase.
10th Annual National Exhibition of Prints and
Drawings, Oklahoma Art Center, Oklahoma City,
Oklahoma. Purchase award.

Third National Print and Drawing Exhibition, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan.
Purchase award.

24th Wabash Valley Exhibition, Sheldon Swope Art Gallery, Terre Haute, Indiana. Purchase award.

Springfield Art League 49th Annual National Exhibition, George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum, Springfield, Massachusetts. Honorable mention.

Brooklyn Museum National Print Invitational, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York.

First British International Print Biennial, Bradford City Art Gallery and Museum, Yorkshire, England.

Afro-American Print Invitational, St. Augustine College, Raleigh, North Carolina.

National Print and Drawing Exhibition, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois.

Boston Printmakers 20th Annual Exhibition, Boston, Massachusetts.

Northwest Printmakers 39th International Exhibition, Seattle Art Museum Pavilion, Seattle, Washington.

Michigan Indiana Print Exhibition, South Bend Art Association, South Bend, Indiana.

Annual Philadelphia Print Club Members Exhibition, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

1969 *Four Artists*, University Museum, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

Afro-American Print Invitational, Lane College, Jackson, Tennessee.

12 Black American Artists, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.

Afro-American Print Invitational, Shaw University, Raleigh, North Carolina.

21st National Exhibition of Prints, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

Second National Biennial Print Invitational, California State College, Long Beach, California.

Three-man Exhibition of Lithographs, with Nathan Oliveira and Garo Antreasian, Philadelphia Print Club, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Sixteenth National Print Exhibition, Brooklyn Museum Traveling Show, Brooklyn Museum, New York.

Annual Philadelphia Print Club Members Exhibition, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Second Annual National Print Exhibition, San Diego State College, San Diego, California.

1970 Two-man exhibition of prints with Robert Rauschenberg, Editions, Ltd., Art Gallery, Indianapolis, Indiana.
Everyman Gallery, New York, New York.

17th Brooklyn Museum National Print Invitational, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York.

6th National Print and Drawing Competition, Dulin Gallery of Art, Knoxville, Tennessee.

Tyler Alumni Exhibition, Tyler School of Fine Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

1st Annual National Print Exhibition, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia.

Annual Drawing and Print Exhibition, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, North Dakota.

Fourth American Print Biennial, Santiago de Chile. Purchase award.

American Pavilion, 35th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy. Purchase award.

Prints by Seven, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York.

7 x 7, Tyler School of Fine Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Lithographs and Silkscreens from the American Art Center, Fort Worth, Texas.

Collections:

Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York.

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Chicago Art Institute Museum, Chicago, Illinois.

Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, New York.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California.

La Jolla Museum of Art, La Jolla, California.

Pasadena Art Museum, Pasadena, California.

Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, Fort Worth, Texas.

Anacortes Museum, Anacortes, Washington.

Mills College, Oakland, California.

University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, North Dakota.

Henry Gallery of the University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.

Swope Art Gallery, Terre Haute, Indiana.

Grunwald Graphic Art Foundation, UCLA, Los Angeles, California.

Lessing J. Rosenwald Foundation, Jenkintown, Pennsylvania.

Ben R. Smith Collection, California.

John Gordon Collection, New York.

University of Western Michigan, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Oklahoma Art Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

New York City Library Collection of Contemporary Prints, New York, New York.

The Philadelphia Public Library, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Bradley University, Peoria, Illinois.

Miami University, Oxford, Ohio.

Library of Congress Print Collection, Washington, D. C.

Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee.

Alabama A & M University, Normal, Alabama.

Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts.

Smithsonian Institution International Art Program, Washington, D. C.

Fort Worth Art Center, Fort Worth, Texas.

University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware.

Western Illinois University, Macomb, Illinois.

CATALOGUE

All dimensions are given
in inches, height preceding width.

1-10. Triangular Fugue <i>7/10</i>	1965 <i>17 x 14</i> <i>A suite of seven color lithographs and one black and white plus title page and colophon in color lithog- raphy.</i>	21. A Love Supreme <i>Drawing</i>	1967 <i>35 x 46</i>
11. Six Bagatelles <i>Etching, A/P</i>	1966 <i>23 3/16 x 19 1/8</i>	22. Fall 1967 <i>Drawing</i>	1967 <i>35 x 46</i>
12. Hat + Beard <i>Etching, 5/20</i>	1967 <i>22 3/8 x 19 1/8</i>	23. Mama Too Tight <i>Drawing</i>	1967 <i>35 x 46</i>
13. Kush <i>Etching, 4/20</i>	1967 <i>16 9/16 x 13</i>	24. Portrait of Bud <i>Drawing</i>	1968 <i>46 x 35</i>
14. Gimbels <i>Etching, 4/20</i>	1967 <i>16 5/8 x 13 1/8</i>	25. Lu-Yah <i>Drawing</i>	1968 <i>46 x 35</i>
15. Sounds <i>Etching, 3/20</i>	1967 <i>16 3/4 x 13 1/8</i>	26. That's All Right <i>Drawing</i>	1968 <i>46 x 35</i>
16. On that Great Day if it Should Come <i>Etching, A/P</i>	1967 <i>27 3/4 x 20</i>	27. Karma <i>Drawing</i>	1968 <i>46 x 35</i>
17. Swamp Flower <i>Etching, 4/20</i>	1967 <i>22 7/8 x 28 7/8</i>	28. To Where <i>Drawing</i>	1968 <i>46 x 35</i>
18. The White Wheel of W.T.H. <i>Etching, 12/20</i>	1967 <i>22 1/8 x 28 1/4</i>	29. And I had Become a Man with the Slippery Future of a Fish . . . <i>Etching, A/P</i>	1968 <i>26 3/4 x 38 1/2</i>
19. Soul Coltrane <i>Etching, A/P</i>	1967 <i>19 7/8 x 26 1/2</i>	30. Whew !! <i>Etching, 5/20</i>	1968 <i>28 1/4 x 20 7/8</i>
20. Wanda's Flight <i>Drawing</i>	1967 <i>25 5/8 x 40</i>	31. Yea . . . Janlee <i>Etching, A/P</i>	1968 <i>28 1/4 x 21 7/8</i>
		32. Tomorrow is the Question <i>Drawing</i>	1968 <i>46 x 35</i>
		33. Doughnut <i>Lithograph, 14/15</i>	1969 <i>30 x 22 1/8</i>

34. Nuff Stuff 1969
Color Lithograph, 15/18
 30 x 22 5/16

35. Yeaah ! 1969
Color Lithograph, 16/20
 30 x 22 5/16

36. It's Time 1969
Color Lithograph, 19/20
 30 x 22 5/16

37. Welll Du !! 1969
Color Lithograph, 15/20
 30 x 22 5/16

38. Love Poem 1970
Drawing 30 x 22 1/4

39. Directions—Open, then Close 1970
Drawing 30 x 22 1/4

40. Poem—Dance for Lady Day 1970
Drawing 30 x 22 1/4

41. Far Cry 1970
Drawing 30 x 22 1/4

42. Uh-Huh 1970
Drawing 30 x 22 1/4

43. Haiku 1970
Drawing 30 x 22 1/4

44. A Silent Way 1970
Drawing 30 x 22 1/4

45. Score for a Blues Thing 1970
Drawing 30 x 22 1/4

46. For the Pridgen and the Hunt 1970
Color Lithograph, 9/20
 30 x 22 5/16

47. Damn if I Know 1970
Color Lithograph, 11/20
 30 x 22 5/16

48. Letter to My Betty I 1970
Color Lithograph, A/P 15 x 12

49. Letter to My Betty II 1970
Color Lithograph, A/P 15 x 12

50-57. Visual Poems 1970-71
A/P 20 x 15
 A group of eight color lithographs
 in an edition of twenty with a title
 page and colophon printed by the
 Finial Press, Champaign, Illinois,
 and including the following titles:
Ponte
Gregorio
Drownin' on Dry Land
Love Vibrations
Just Heard Bessie
Coltrane Sonnet
Um, Um, . . . Um !!

58. Dream 1971
Drawing 30 x 22 1/4

59. Letter Poem 1971
Drawing 30 x 22 1/4

60. Polyrhythms 1971
Drawing 30 x 22 1/4

61. To Break Away 1971
Drawing 30 x 22 1/4



The image shows a piece of paper with handwritten text and musical notation. The text "John Dowd, Jr." is written twice in cursive, once above a staff of musical notes and once below it. The musical notation is in green ink, featuring a staff with various notes (circles with stems) and rests. Some notes are highlighted with purple ink, including a sharp sign and a double bar line. The paper has a light beige or cream color.